



HANDBOOK FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

Working Together to Improve Alaska Communities

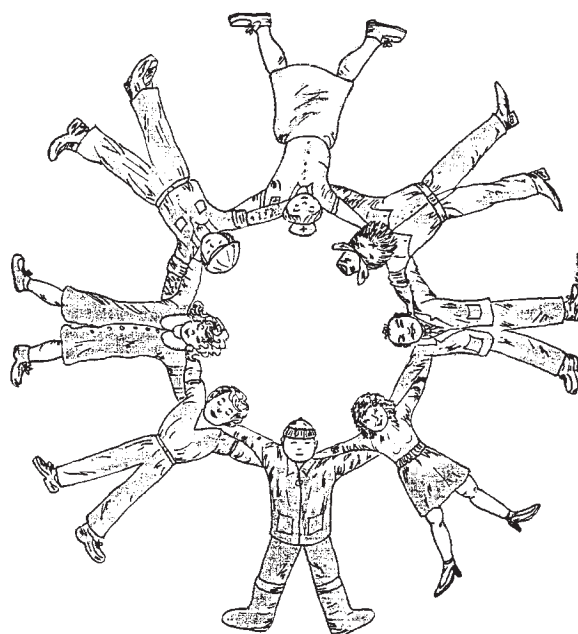
Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

Changing the World

Alaskans working together to improve their communities are engaged in the most fundamental of democratic behaviors — citizen-driven social change. The most meaningful change is that which responds to the values and visions of citizens. The most useful change is that which is conceived, created and implemented by citizens on a local level. They may seek assistance from their governing institutions, but the role of local, state and federal elected and administrative organizations is to respond — not control.

So, how can Alaskans organize into the “small group(s) of thoughtful, committed citizens” who can change their world? Civic discourse is one of a number of labels that describe group processes for convening, framing, designing and facilitating civil conversations. Also referred to as dialogue and deliberation or deliberative democracy, these processes all seek to create a safe space for people to share their thoughts, learn from one another and develop trusting relationships from which they can move from talk to action. This prepolitical demo-



cratic behavior focuses on raising awareness about shared values, facilitating shared learning and creating shared visions for a better future. It is a necessary prelude to public action.

— Arlot “Bill” Hall
UAF Cooperative Extension Service

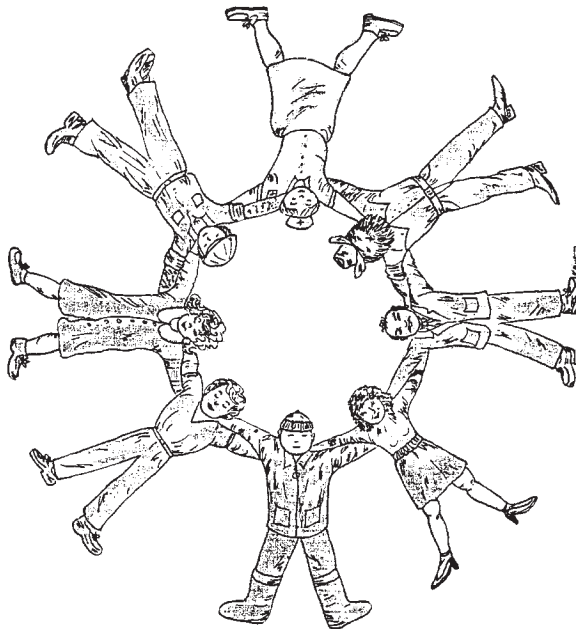
www.uaf.edu/ces or 1-877-520-5211

This publication is intended to help resolve a community issue. Each topic includes a checklist of specific steps to help you communicate with elected officials, local leaders and other community members as you work toward resolution.

You will learn more specific information through actual involvement and developing a Plan of Action. As you interact with others, you will become aware of more alternatives and possibilities. Keep an open mind and work toward the goal of establishing a working relationship with your local government that will contribute to making your community a better place to live.

Table of Contents

Topic 1: Identifying the Issues	1
Figure 1: Developing the Community Problem-Solving Plan of Action	2
Topic 2: Building a Coalition	3
Topic 3: Making Personal Contacts	4
Figure 2: Media Strategy: Advantages and Limitations.....	6
Topic 4: Utilizing the Media.....	7
Topic 5: Writing Letters	8
Topic 6: Giving Public Testimony	9
Topic 7: Understanding the Referendum/Initiative Process.....	11
Topic 8: Evaluating Your Progress.....	12
Conclusion	14
Bibliography	14



Identifying the Issues

To solve a community problem, you first have to break the problem into workable issues. Issues are sometimes controversial, and they often reflect differing points of view. Developing a **Plan of Action** (figure 1) that has the best chance of success depends on thoroughly thinking about the problem in terms of its issues.

Example: A group of citizens might be upset over the increasing number of four-wheeler accidents. Potential issues contained in the problem include differing points of view on land use, individual rights, recreation needs, education and enforcement. The issues have to be identified and discussed before a solution can be proposed.

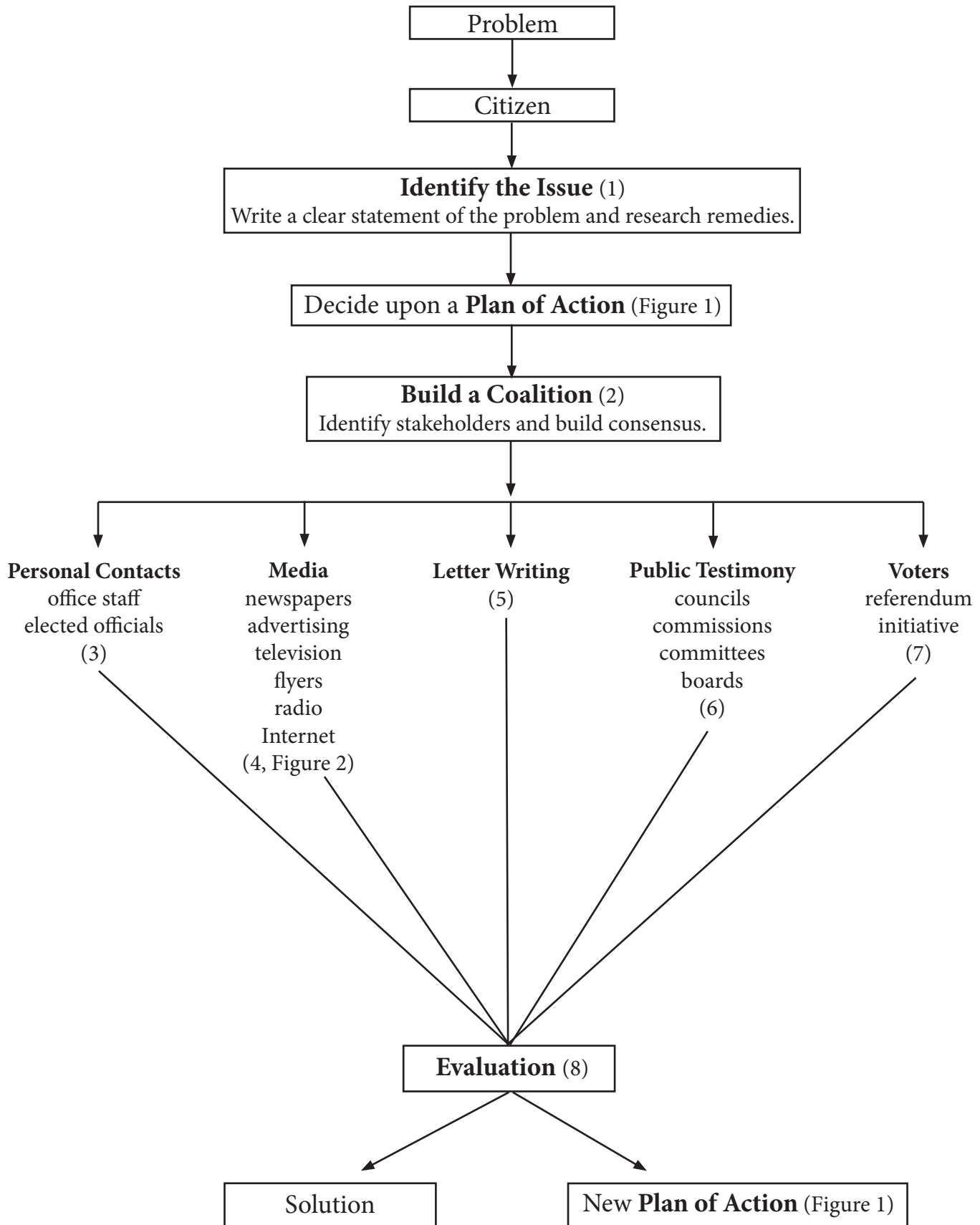
You may find it helpful to spend a few hours talking about the issues with a support group in preparation for developing a **Plan of Action**. The following action checklist provides focus for a group discussion as you begin the first step in working toward resolution.

Action Checklist

1. **Identify the general topic of which the problem is a part.** Understanding the topic may be important later in putting together a **Plan of Action**. (Example: If the problem involves four-wheeler accidents, then the topic could be “safety.”)
2. **Write a clear statement of the problem.** Use the information you have agreed on in discussing the general topic. Problems are generally negative. Problems are not controversies, but the issues within them can be very controversial. (Example: Too many children and young adults who ride four-wheelers disregard their own safety and the safety of others and, as a consequence, die or become seriously injured each year.)
3. **Identify the issues involved.** You must anticipate and discuss differing points of view from all those who have an interest in the outcome. Discussing the following two categories of issues will generate information to help develop a successful **Plan of Action**.
 - A. **Remedy Issues.** These are the what, when, where, how, why and who of the problem. Answer each of the following questions. You may have several answers for each question. The issues will become important as individuals express differing points of view concerning the cause and/or the solution to the problem.
 - 1) What is happening?
 - 2) When is this happening?
 - 3) Where is this happening?
 - 4) Why is this happening?
 - 5) How is the best way to handle this?
 - 6) Who is the best person, organization or agency to work with?
 - B. **Resource Issues.** These issues involve identifying where to find the power, personnel and funds. Answer the following questions. You may have several answers for each question.
 - 1) What are the rules which affect the problem or the process that must be followed to correct the problem?
 - 2) Who has the final say?
 - 3) Who benefits?
 - 4) Who pays?
4. **Plan of Action.** Use the remedy and resource issues that will help to identify all the people (stakeholders) who have an interest in resolving the issue. After identifying the issues, refer to the following sections — Building a Coalition, Making Personal Contacts, Utilizing the Media, Writing Letters, Giving Public Testimony, Understanding the Referendum/Initiative Process, and Evaluating Your Progress — for information on how to proceed.

Notes:

Figure 1. Developing the Community Problem-Solving Plan of Action



Building a Coalition

Identifying the Stakeholders (those affected by the issue)

Once an issue or problem has been identified, all subsequent tasks focus on identifying and collaborating with those affected. These stakeholders include those who are directly and/or adversely affected by the issue, along with other individuals, groups, organizations and agencies that have an interest — or a stake — in the issue. These are the stakeholders, also known as the target public. Change in the stakeholders' or beneficiaries' knowledge base and practices are critical to successful resolution of a community problem. Stakeholders must be directly involved in determining what must change and how the change will be brought about.

Many stakeholders may already be providing programs in attempts to address the issue; their expertise and resources are valuable. Not only must stakeholders develop a commitment to collaborate with each other, they'll need to agree and commit to be a part of problem resolution to ensure their empowerment through the community-based process. Stakeholders must come to see the issue through the eyes of other stakeholders.

In addition, stakeholders must realize that pooling resources is more effective than working alone. Leaders of stakeholder groups must work closely together to further study and analyze the issue and to build consensus on a collaborative plan for resolution. The objective is for these leaders to form an issue-based coalition and to work toward resolving the community problem.

Identifying the leaders of the stakeholder groups is critical; equally important is for the leaders to be aware of how the issue affects the quality of life for their members. Cultivating this awareness among the leaders opens the door for developing consensus

that the issue is important to the well-being of all who are affected.

Forming a coalition is a critical stage as stakeholders become responsible for identifying issues and looking for resolution. The coalition now has responsibility for resolving the issue. Leaders can create a vision that will be shared and supported by the community because they are legitimate spokespersons of the people they represent. The shared vision is like two-way communication: it comes from the people and returns to them in a continuing cycle of interaction.

The study and analysis of the issue and the refinement of its definition by the leaders provide the basis for a successful **Plan of Action**. Through collaboration, the coalition can develop a shared vision that provides the driving force for resolving an issue and achieves what individuals and organizations acting alone are not able to accomplish.

Action Checklist

1. **Identify the people who are directly and adversely affected by the issue.** Involve all stakeholders in defining the issue and determining what must change and how the change will be brought about.
2. **Develop commitment to collaborate.** Perceive the issue through eyes of other stakeholders. Become aware of how the issue affects the quality of life for all members of the various stakeholder groups.
3. **Identify leaders of stakeholder groups.** These leaders must work closely together to further study and analyze the issue.
4. **Build consensus.** Cultivate awareness that the issue is important to the well-being of all who are affected.
5. **Create vision.** A shared vision that is positive and inspiring is the driving force for resolving the issue.

Notes:

Making Personal Contacts

Many public officials value personal contacts more than other forms of communication. Find out the most effective way to make your group's opinion heard through people who personally know the public official, such as other public officials, agency staff and administrative aides.

All forms of communication are more effective by being well organized. Having identified the issues and being able to suggest specific responses will make the time worthwhile and productive.

Personally contacting an agency or staff person may be more valuable than contacting public officials. In researching the problem and identifying the issues, find out the most influential person, group or agency that can assist.

Action Checklist

1. Seek broad support for your ideas.

- A. Start with your circle of friends and organizations.
- B. You may discover other organizations and individuals who share your concern. Contact the groups listed below to gather information, advertise your idea and gain support:
 - 1) Local, state and national groups of interested citizens
 - 2) Legislative offices
 - 3) Government agencies
 - 4) Appointive boards, commissions or committees
- C. Contacting others can be accomplished by:
 - 1) Interviewing knowledgeable individuals
 - 2) Attending group meetings
 - 3) Writing a letter
 - 4) Meeting with staff of governmental offices or agencies
 - 5) Appearing before boards, commissions or committees
- D. Brainstorm with your support group to expand alternatives, evaluate new information and further develop your Plan of Action.

2. Communicate with public officials.

- A. Develop a personal relationship with the public official. Get to know your officials by

attending public meetings, including fundraisers and similar functions.

- 1) Introduce yourself to the officials before, after or during a break at the meeting.
- 2) Mention that you would like to talk to them at a more convenient time about your issue.
- 3) Be brief and polite.

B. Request a personal meeting with a public official to present your case.

- 1) Make an appointment at his/her convenience.
- 2) Be on time for your appointment.
- 3) At the meeting, identify:
 - a) Yourself
 - b) Your group

C. Discuss what you would like from the official:

- 1) Be organized and brief in presenting your views.
- 2) Ask the public official to share his/her views.
- 3) Leave a printed statement with the official.
- 4) Be prepared for questions. If you cannot answer the question, be honest in your response and promise to reply by letter or by phone.
- 5) Follow up the meeting with a letter of appreciation.
- 6) Make a written record of all conversations and phone calls.

3. Communicate with aides or office staff.

- A. Treat aides or office staff as you would a legislator. The staff can influence decisions which the legislator must make. In addition, office staff are sometimes able to provide the exact response you need because they have the authority to provide you with certain types of assistance.
- B. Develop a relationship with members of the support staff; they are valuable sources of information. It is the job of aides and office staff to respond to the public while helping the legislator with the many demands of that office.

4. Communicate with an agency.

- A. Be prepared.

- 1) Write down your questions.
 - 2) Know as much of the policy as possible.
 - 3) Phone ahead.
 - 4) Determine the chain of command.
 - 5) Be prepared to pay for copies of documents that you may want.
- B. Be respectful and pleasant.
- C. Write down the name of the person you're dealing with.
- D. Follow up with a letter of thanks in which you briefly review the main points of your conversation.
- E. Keep copies of communications.

Important Contacts

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Important Contacts (cont.)

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Name: _____
 Phone number: _____
 E-mail: _____

Figure 2. Media Strategy — Advantages and Limitations

Adapted from *We Interrupt This Program: A Citizen's Guide to Using the Media for Social Change* by Robbie Gordon.

Media	Advantages	Limitations	How To
Press Releases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reaches wide circulation through print and electronic media free publicity press coverage lends clout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not good for a limited/small audience may not be best place for reaching target audience time of day; page article appears on; size of article or length of story affect whether audience sees article and its effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write in acceptable newspaper style be accurate, spell names and places correctly know deadlines provide contact name and phone number
Press Coverage at Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> informs those who didn't attend meeting of decisions/ proceedings keeps issues/events before public eye useful for raising public opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> potential for misquotes interpretation of reporter may differ from your own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advance notice to news media of exact time and place of event and subject matter provide printed handouts with facts, figures in advance
Columns or Regular Features; Article Series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides in-depth public education on issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> difficult to convince media to do need enough information for several articles weekly deadlines takes lots of time takes a lot of research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop good rapport with news media be accurate have enough information
Brochures, Handouts, Mailers, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> direct mail ensures you reach intended audience is a reminder for people can be more eye appealing / attention-getting than articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> could be costly often thrown away some people don't like to get mailers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eye-catching and informative
Posters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attracts attention additional exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need people to post costly and location of poster important (or may not reach audience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good colors basic information in easy to read lettering
Internet, YouTube e-mails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reaches wide audience free instantaneous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need technical expertise information is sometimes not credible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> know how to use and keep up with technology
Public Service Ads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> could be more attention-getting than an article good as supplement to article for publicity for event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> must run a week to be effective costly (generally 25% off regular price of newspaper ads) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be concise, informative
Newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good for networking in-depth information provides forum for community people acts as clearinghouse for information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> costly and needs a staff time-consuming needs submissions needs to remain lively and relevant needs printer must meet deadlines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keep it current use informative and interesting articles need group cooperation and involvement

Utilizing the Media

The media represents a powerful force in any community. It influences who affects our government, how money is spent, the opinions we form and how we spend our free time. The many forms of media all have the potential to become valuable tools in publicizing ideas and generating public support. Organizations, groups or individuals using these tools should begin with a well-defined issue, which is then supported by a **Plan of Action**.

Success in reaching your goal will be affected by your choice of medium. Understanding the advantages and limitations of each will help match the most efficient medium with your intended audience. Working with a group that shares your goals, develop a plan that will inform your community about the issue you want resolved.

Action Checklist

1. **Analyze your problem thoroughly to identify the major issues.** (See “Identifying the Issue.”)
 - A. Identify other interest groups and influential persons or organizations.

Notes:

- B. Pinpoint the procedure that you will use to bring about a favorable policy decision concerning the issues you want resolved.
2. **Establish realistic goals for your media campaign.**
 - A. Identify the audience that you need to educate to gain support for resolving the targeted issues.
 - B. Working with your group, identify specific objectives which will help you accomplish the goal.
3. **Be sure that the information you use in your media campaign is correct.**
 - A. Assign someone in your group to check the accuracy of information you intend to use.
 - B. Be sure that your group approves of the media campaign and information you have chosen to use.
4. **Meet the media deadlines.**
 - A. Develop a time schedule that allows you to meet the deadlines of the media you have chosen. Plan ahead. Remember, you must consider the work schedules and deadlines of the media to accomplish your goals.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Writing Letters

Elected officials like to hear from constituents. Letters do count, especially if they are individually written and well organized. The quantity and quality have been known to influence the outcomes of many public policy decisions.

Writing a letter can be done at home and provides a quick way to express public opinion with minimal effort. Writing in longhand is perfectly acceptable. Depending on the preference of the person to whom you are writing, handwritten letters sometimes receive faster responses. Make sure the letter is legible, uses good grammar and is spelled correctly. Have a friend read the letter before you send it to obtain his/her opinion on its effectiveness.

The following action checklist suggests ways to develop a letter for the greatest influence.

Action Checklist

1. **Identify the issue or issues involved in the problem.** (see "Identifying the Issues")
2. **To whom do you write?**
 - A. Legislators, state and national
 - B. Commissioners, directors
 - C. Mayor, assembly or council persons
 - D. School board
 - E. Governor and staff
 - F. Letter to the editor
 - G. Community organizations
 - H. Public agencies and local officials
3. **How do you find the address?**
 - A. Legislative Information Office
 - B. City or Borough Assembly office
 - C. Chamber of Commerce, Alaska Municipal League
 - D. Cooperative Extension Service district offices
 - E. Phone book
 - F. Neighborhood associations (e.g., community councils, civic clubs)
 - G. Library (ask for the reference librarian)
4. **What do you say?**
 - A. The letter should include five basic paragraphs.
 - 1) State the problem; be brief, accurate and specific.

- 2) Explain how the problem affects you, your family and community.
 - 3) Suggest an alternative action.
 - 4) Ask for the official's position.
 - 5) Thank the person to whom you are writing.
 - B. Try to fit all five paragraphs on one page. Two pages should be an absolute maximum.
 - C. Be timely. Give the person, agency or group time to respond.
5. **What should you do next?**
- A. Send copies of your letter to organizations, other public officials, newspapers and individuals who may support your efforts.
 - B. Keep a copy of your letter as well as the official's reply. File these where you can easily find them in the event that you need to follow up with some action or response.
 - C. Thank the official if favorable action is taken. Let the official know your thoughts if he or she expresses a contrary opinion, or if no action is taken.
6. **Use other ways to communicate your concerns.**
- A. Use the free "public opinion messages" available at the State of Alaska Legislative Information Office. Start a campaign within your community and have others send messages. There is strength in numbers.
 - B. Join an existing organization or form your own organization to gain community support for your ideas.
 - C. Learn how to use Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and other new but well-established methods of social networking.

Notes:

Giving Public Testimony

An effective way to voice your opinion on a community issue is to testify at a public meeting such as a hearing or an assembly meeting. Providing testimony allows you to state your point of view and demonstrate that you know your facts and represent a broad-based community group.

Being well-prepared, organized and familiar with the rules that govern the decision-making process is essential to effectively communicate your opinion. The following action checklist suggests ways to help you plan how to give testimony before a decision-making body.

Action Checklist

- 1. Do your homework well in advance.**
 - A. Research your issue (see “Identifying the Issues”).
 - 1) Get all the facts.
 - 2) Check your facts for accuracy.
 - 3) Find out the arguments for the opposition. If the opposition has valid points, modify your position accordingly.
 - 4) Be ready to answer questions.
 - B. If you are representing a group:
 - 1) Be sure your testimony is approved by the group.
 - 2) Document your support.
 - a. Was a vote taken? How many for and against?
 - b. Was a survey conducted?
 - c. Was a petition circulated?
 - d. Do you have letters of support?
 - 3) Let group members check your rough draft and give suggestions.
- 2. Get on the agenda.**
 - A. Notify the group to which you will give testimony, being aware that it generally must be informed a specific number of days in advance of your intended appearance.
 - B. Ask the borough or city clerk (or chair of the decision-making body) for advice on getting on the agenda.
- 3. Prepare your remarks.**
 - A. Know the time frame, which is usually:
 - 1) Three minutes if representing yourself.
 - 2) Five minutes if representing a group.
 - B. Organize the main points of your presentation into three sections.
 - 1) Introduction: State what the issue is.
 - 2) Body: State how this issue affects you, your family and community. Document your opinion with facts and examples.
 - 3) Summary/conclusion: Review what you have stated. Ask for a specific action on the part of the group to which you are speaking.
 - C. Outline major points.
 - D. Write a rough draft using your outline.
 - 1) Share the rough draft with other group members.
 - 2) Let group members add their suggestions.
 - E. Make your final copy.
 - F. Have extra copies to hand out at the meeting to:
 - 1) Board members. If possible, have copies included in the information packets that are distributed ahead of time.
 - 2) The media.
 - 3) Interested persons/potential supporters.
 - G. Have any visual aids neatly prepared and ready; know how to use the equipment. (Unorganized and/or illegible visuals will work against you.)
 - H. Consider dividing your presentation among several individuals who can each offer a unique reason to support your point of view.
- 4. Practice your testimony at home.**
 - A. Time yourself.
 - B. Familiarize yourself with your material.
 - C. Improve delivery.
- 5. The actual hearing.**
 - A. Arrive on time, sign up to provide testimony and sit in the front row if possible.
 - B. Ask members of your group and other interested individuals to attend the meeting. Have them:
 - 1) All arrive on time.
 - 2) Sit together.
 - 3) Ask them to stand when you say, “There are others present who support my views. Will they please stand?”
 - C. Check the agenda to find out when you will speak.

D. When you are called:

- 1) Go to the front or up to the microphone.
- 2) Face the decision-making body.
- 3) Address the chairman and members (Mr. or Madam Chair and members of the board, commission, etc.).
- 4) Introduce yourself and identify the group you represent.
- 5) Give your presentation.
 - a. State your approval or disapproval of the issue.
 - b. Support your opinion or reasons with facts.
 - c. Be brief, concise, logical and natural.
 - i. If anyone asks questions:
 1. Answer the best you can.
 2. If you can't answer:
 - a) Admit you don't know.
 - b) Promise to find out and let them know.
 - c) Be sure to follow through.
 - d) Send your answer to the media.

E. Thank the group for allowing you to speak.

6. At hearing recess:

- A. Introduce yourself to individual board members.
- B. Talk to them about your cause.
- C. Help them remember you.
- D. Listen to the points made by the opposition.
- E. Give written copies of your testimony to the group after you speak.

7. After the hearing:

- A. Write a letter to the board (council, assembly, etc.) thanking them for their consideration.
- B. Write to the editor about your concern (see “Writing Letters”).
- C. If the board decides against you, don’t give up.
 - 1) Find out if you can appeal and
 - a. Where to file it;
 - b. When to file it.
 - 2) If you have no formal appeal, work for a different solution to address the issue.
 - a. Return to the issue identification stage and rethink the issues involved in the problem.
 - b. Decide upon a new **Plan of Action** (see “Evaluating Your Progress”).

Notes:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Understanding the Referendum/Initiative Process

The State of Alaska permits citizens direct access to legislative power through granting the opportunity to change or create laws. This applies to state, borough and city elections. Two processes are therefore available for citizens' use in directly affecting public law. A **referendum** is the procedure that allows citizens to change an existing law. An **initiative** is the procedure that allows citizens to create a new law.

The development process for a referendum is the same as for an initiative. Following a petition process, a referendum or an initiative must be passed by a majority of voters within a city or a borough or the entire state to change an existing law or create a new law. The state law that guarantees citizens the right to change or create laws is found in Title 29, Chapter 28, Article 2 of the *Alaska Statutes*.

Action Checklist

1. **Contact the city or borough clerk to acquire the correct forms and to check on specific regulations for filing.**
 - A. Ask the clerk to provide you with a copy of rules and regulations governing the petition process.
 - B. Become aware of the entire procedure and the time line for completing the petition process.
2. **Working with your support group, develop your petition.**
 - A. If you need assistance:
 - 1) Ask the city or borough clerk to show you a sample, or
 - 2) Contact a local government specialist, a lawyer or an experienced person to help write the petition.
3. **Plan how you will circulate the petition.** Decide how many signatures will be needed, who will be responsible for collecting signatures and what timetable is necessary to collect a specific quantity and avoid last minute rushes.
4. **File your petition with the city or borough clerk 90 days from the day it is first circulated.**
5. **Once your plans are agreed upon, begin to collect signatures.** Important parts of the petition process to remember include:
 - A. A referendum or an initiative must be supported by registered voter signatures:
 - 1) Twenty-five percent of the number of votes cast in the last general election if the city size is less than 7,500 people
 - 2) Fifteen percent of the number of votes cast in the last general election if the city size is more than 7,500 people
 - B. "Qualified voter" is a person who is both qualified to vote and is a registered voter in the area where the referendum or initiative will be voted upon.
 - C. Illegible signatures will be taken off the petition.
 - D. Be sure to follow the rules carefully so that your petition will not be rejected for technical reasons. Care must be given to the process of developing your petition so that the time your group spends on this activity is not wasted.
6. **Once your petition is accepted, the next step is to organize voter support for the coming election.**

Notes:

Evaluating Your Progress

Since the issue being addressed can be complex, your coalition's first attempt to resolve it may not be completely successful. Typically, efforts are progressive and evolutionary. After each successive attempt at resolution, improvements are made in the **Plan of Action** to produce better results with the next planning and implementation cycle. Information gained through evaluating each cycle is important in measuring the success of the **Plan of Action**, reporting outcomes to stakeholders and using lessons learned.

The final evaluation is directed toward determining the extent to which the coalition achieved the goals and objectives set forth in the **Plan of Action**. It will determine the extent to which the issue has been resolved or has moved toward resolution. To provide useful and accurate information, the final impact evaluation must be tightly coupled with the coalition's **Plan of Action** and should represent col-

lective agreement among coalition members about expected outcomes that are expressed in terms of effects upon the issue being addressed. A final impact assessment plan should include:

- Clear and concise articulation of the issue being addressed
- Clear and concise articulation of the coalition's goal, usually presented as a vision of what conditions would be like if the issue were fully resolved
- Statement of objectives
- Expected outcomes for each objective
- Specific indicator(s) for each expected outcome to determine whether each objective has been achieved
- Data collection and analysis processes

A suggested format for the recording and presentation of these components of the evaluation plan follows:

Description of original problem: _____

Agreed-upon goal to address problem: _____

Sub-issues encompassed in issue: _____

Stakeholders: _____

Planned activities: _____

Expected outcomes: _____

Indicator(s) of outcomes: _____

Alternative outcomes: _____

- A. **Problem successfully resolved or solution achieved, or**
B. **Suggestions for next time or new plan of action:**

Changes in the **Plan of Action** should be reflected in plans to evaluate outcomes. Whenever the **Plan of Action** is revised as a result of monitoring (formative evaluation), the evaluation plan should be adjusted accordingly. For example, abandoned objectives should be deleted from the evaluation plan.

Because evaluation is a key function of the coalition and because each member may bring a different perspective to the task, it is important for all coalition members to be actively involved in the evaluation process. A common source of problems in the final impact evaluation is imprecision or ambiguity in the goal statement. A vague goal statement can indicate that the coalition is unsure of the outcomes expected from implementing a **Plan of Action**. Unless goal statements are clear and specific, identifying and measuring expected outcomes is virtually impossible. If attainment of the goal cannot be measured, no matter how clearly the goal is stated, coalition members will have difficulty drawing conclusions about their progress.

An indicator is documented evidence that supports the coalition's claims regarding the outcomes of collaborative actions taken to address an issue. Indicators lend credibility to the conclusions drawn about the success of the coalition's efforts and provide a basis for recommending future actions. An indicator is a measure of the expected outcome. For example, the number of participants regularly attending workshops would be an indicator of the success or failure of efforts to recruit participants among the target public. A sign-in sheet at workshops could document that outcome. Documented evidence can be either quantitative (a numerical measure, such as a percentage change in the condition) or qualitative (a descriptive measure, such as a chronology of the condition).

Referring back to the "Identifying the Issues" checklist on page 1, several organizations will have contributed resources. Reporting results can be an effective means to keep coalition members informed and committed to resolving the issue. Positive results can help gain the support of stakeholders who may have initially resisted becoming involved. The coalition's success can also help recruit other members to participate in the coalition's further efforts to resolve the issue.

Action Checklist

1. **Articulate clearly and concisely:**
 - A. The issue
 - B. The coalition's goal
 - C. Expected outcomes for each objective
 - D. Specific indicator(s)
2. **Report Results.** Let the stakeholders know whether efforts have been productive.
3. **Alter Plan of Action as necessary.**

Notes:

Conclusion

Five important points to consider as you work toward a solution of the community problem follow:

1. **Identify the issues that are part of the problem.**
2. **Determine the stakeholders related to the issue and become aware of their diverse perceptions.**
3. **Target the goal you want to accomplish and decide on the specific objectives that will help you reach that goal.** The goal involves solving the problem, and the objectives will depend on the issues you identify.
4. **Develop your Plan of Action based on your goal and objectives.**
5. **Evaluate progress as you proceed with your Plan of Action and be ready to alter your plans as needed, but always keep the goal clearly in focus.**

Evaluation, as it applies here, involves making a decision as to whether or not your activities have helped to accomplish your goal. By developing your **Plan of Action**, you have targeted specific objectives related to the issues that are important to resolving a community problem. As you and your group become actively involved in resolving the problem, take the time to discuss the effectiveness of each activity. It is normal to alter plans as situations change and new information becomes known. The goal, however, should always remain the same if you are correct in your perception of the problem.

This publication has been produced to help individuals or groups begin the process of resolving a community problem. There are a host of people who are able to assist. You can find them in your neighborhood councils, city governments, community schools, school districts, PTA, Legislative Information Office and the Cooperative Extension

Service. The best community resource directory is your phone book.

Helping to make your community a better place to live contributes to the well-being of everyone. What you are doing is valuable and important work.

Bibliography

Boone, Edgar J. and Associates. 1997. *Community Leadership Through Community-Based Programming: The Role of the Community College*. Community College Press.

Dickerson, Larry. 2002. *Creating Healthy Communities: The Process of Community Discovery*. Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska Fairbanks, CRD-00012.

Green, Gary Paul and Anna Haines. 2008. *Asset Building and Community Development*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Let Your ASSETS Be Your Guide: A Handbook for Community Planning. 2006. Rural Alaska Community Action Program.

Making a Difference: The Legislative Process in Alaska. 2000. State Office of University Relations. University of Alaska.

Thomas, Clive and Tony Nakazawa. 2012. *Working Effectively with the Legislature and Governor's Office and State Agencies*. Understanding the Alaska Legislative Process Workshop 2012. Anchorage, Alaska.

The Cooperative Extension Service would like to acknowledge Gene Kane, Elizabeth Manfred and Ladonna Lindley for their review comments of this publication.

Anthony Nakazawa, Extension Economist, **Edgar Blatchford**, Associate Professor, University of Alaska Anchorage, **Edgar Boone**, Professor Emeritus, North Carolina State University, **Anthony Garcia**, Dartmouth University graduate student, and **Arlot "Bill" Hall**, Extension Engagement/Outreach Program Coordinator. This publication was originally titled *Local Government Works: A Manual for Community Problem Solving* and was prepared by Donna Alspaugh, Karen Mattson, Linda McMahon, Laurie McNicholas, Rita Pfauth, Glen Ray, Isabelle Rogan and Nancy Rowland.



America's Arctic University

Published by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The University of Alaska Fairbanks is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer and educational institution.

©2012 University of Alaska Fairbanks.

12-84/GR/3-12

Revised March 2012